

## Just Incorporating Advocacy to Enhance Conviction Integrity

**Introduction** [00:00:05] Now this is recording, RTI International Center for Forensic Science presents Just Science.

**Voiceover** [00:00:19] Welcome to Just Science, a podcast for justice professionals and anyone interested in learning more about forensic science, innovative technology, current research, and actionable strategies to improve the criminal justice system. In episode two of our Enhancing Conviction Integrity through Forensics mini season, Just Science sat down with Amy Durall, a Project Manager with the International Association of Chiefs of Police, to discuss the incorporation of advocacy into the judicial proceedings. Advocates play a critical role in addressing the needs of a victim or family, as well as providing insight to other allied professionals that they work alongside. It is important to understand the varieties of advocates and how their respective roles may differ. Listen along as Amy Durall dives deep into advocacy models, victim well-being, and opportunities for agencies to enhance their response to victims and their families. This episode is funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Here's your host, Chris Williams.

**Chris Williams** [00:01:10] Hello and welcome to Just Science. I'm your host, Chris Williams. This is the second episode of our four-part series supporting Enhancing Conviction Integrity through Forensics funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Today, our guest is Amy Durall, a Project Manager with the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Welcome, Amy. It's great to have you on with us.

**Amy Durall** [00:01:29] Thanks so much, Chris. I'm really- I'm really excited and appreciative of the opportunity to have the conversation today.

**Chris Williams** [00:01:36] Can you tell us a little bit about yourself before we get too deep into the content today?

**Amy Durall** [00:01:40] Sure. I am currently employed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police, but that employment supports a 35 plus year career involved with multidisciplinary work over the course of that 35 years. On the front end of my career, I spent a good portion of time working in a corrections environment for people who were incarcerated that had also had mental health issues. The latter half of my career has been focused on victim services. I've been the director of a couple of different units within law enforcement agencies, and then that dovetailed into national work. So I've had the pleasure of working on committees and initiatives at the national level that really focus on multidisciplinary collaboration around victim intersections with the justice system.

**Chris Williams** [00:02:29] I know you have a lot of experience in the field and that has really helped your current role with IACP. Can you talk a little bit about what prompted you to make that shift to IACP?

**Amy Durall** [00:02:39] You know, when I was in the field, I was very, very engaged in the daily work. I felt like I was contributing to very purpose driven activity in the agency that I worked for. And we were hosting training, ironically enough, for volunteers. I worked for an agency where our victim service personnel would respond out on crime scenes, and we trained volunteers twice a year. I managed a very large personnel department. I had 70 plus personnel that I was responsible for in victim services. And through that training, there was a citizen that signed up for training. And after he sat through the- the entire training course approached me and he had previously done some work for IACP and recognized

the value of what we were doing in that community and recommended me to participate on a committee that IACP ran and it was the Victim Services Committee and got to know multiple partners throughout the nation. That led into consulting work and national conversations, and from there, there was an employment shift. And so I think it was a good lesson for me. I was performing my work through a really solid space of integrity. I believed in what I was doing. I believed in the value of the work that I was doing. And I just stayed open to- to the connections that were made through that. And that's what led me to this work.

**Chris Williams** [00:04:01] What a great opportunity. Sounds definitely like a happening of chance, maybe a little bit of fate as well. If you could pick one thing, what would you view as one of the most rewarding parts of your current role with IACP?

**Amy Durall** [00:04:14] There's a lot of positive that comes out of my work with IACP. I get exposed to a lot of programs, a lot of different entities, a lot of agencies, a lot of practices. I think for me, I'm a naturally inquisitive person. I like to know the why and how behind everything. I like to also think that I'm a person of integrity and commitment, and so I want to make sure that whatever I'm involved in, we produce the best possible outcomes. And being at IACP has really helped me with that. I've gotten exposed to different practices across the nation. I learned so much about the way we all do shared work. The way that we all carry out shared responsibilities. And just being in a position where I can continue to learn and continue to be engaged in the work and continue to grow professionally has been a huge bonus for me.

**Chris Williams** [00:05:07] Yeah, that's fantastic. I know finding reward in what you're doing as a professional is so important, especially to me, and I feel like that's a great value to have as a professional. But talking a little bit about the true topic for today's podcast episode, so I know that advocacy is a huge part of your background in the field and still very much a part of what you do today for IACP. Can you talk a little bit about the different forms of advocacy that are truly out there?

**Amy Durall** [00:05:35] I mean, that's a big mouthful of a question, first and foremost, right? I think there are some concepts that are really important for me that everybody understands. I think that in order to engage in victim advocacy, you have to understand the differences between advocacy and other types of response that law enforcement and allied professionals might engage in. So, for example, in recent years, there's been some conflating of victim advocacy with crisis response or co-response models. And for me, they're very distinct and separate. So that's important that people understand those distinctions. It's also really important to understand the difference between victim advocacy and people who engage in activism. And those issues have come up in conversation and bubbled up over the- over the recent years. And so for me, when you're behaving as a victim advocate, when you are engaging as a victim advocate, really advocacy is about supporting the positions of the people that you serve. Activism is really about taking a personal position around issues. And so those are very distinct in the way that they're practiced. And it's important to keep those in mind as we carry out our responsibilities within the justice system. I think the other differences or the other types of advocacy, it's important for me to talk about and important for people to recognize there are community-based advocates and those are people that typically work at organizations in the community that are nonprofit-based. So that might be your rape crisis center or the Domestic Violence Response Center or the human trafficking organization in your community. And those advocates may work for that organization. There are law enforcement-based advocates. These victim advocates are hired directly by law

enforcement agencies and are typically available to victims who report crime and who experience victimization and are available to meet with victims at those intersections during the law enforcement response. There's also prosecution-based advocates that are, again, employed by typically government agencies, but they're available when cases move forward to the prosecution phase of the justice system. And then there's corrections-based advocate. In one of the prior communities that I worked in there were victim advocates that worked at the probation office and at the prison system. And so it's really important to understand the distinctions between all those types of advocates so that you can effectively work with all of them in your community.

**Chris Williams** [00:08:04] It's definitely accurate to say that victim services can truly look different from community to community.

**Amy Durall** [00:08:11] But almost a requirement that it look different, right? If we're truly responding to the rights and needs that people have in various communities, we have to adjust our responses and the type of advocacy that we provide in order to meet those unique needs. I wouldn't want to be part of the community response or part of a response to victims where we didn't tailor our responses to meet their unique needs. So it's essential that there's different types of advocacy that are available. And I would say the healthiest communities and the most effective response incorporate all the types of advocacy, not just one.

**Chris Williams** [00:08:48] Yeah, and I agree. I love the the way you phrased it as being tailored to the needs of the community. It certainly sounds like it's crucial. Thinking about representation, would you agree that having representation from other disciplines like law enforcement, attorneys, advocates, is critical to sexual assault response reform?

**Amy Durall** [00:09:07] Absolutely. So I've been in and around sexual assault response work for probably at least three quarters of my career. I cannot imagine doing this kind of work without the response of all of those disciplines involved. It doesn't make any sense to me to think of this as a singular discipline issue. This is an issue that touches on everybody's responsibilities, and so having representation of all the disciplines that have an obligation or a responsibility to respond during episodes of sexual violence, during victimization around sexual violence, it's important that all of those perspectives are included. I rely on those disciplines to teach me how to be a better professional in my own discipline, and I don't know how we respond effectively without all of those disciplines contributing.

**Chris Williams** [00:10:02] Right. Learning from one another, it sounds like is- is very important for not only sustainability but relationship building, I imagine. In thinking about how each discipline has their own unique role and responsibility as part of the larger picture, what exactly does a victim advocate's place at the multidisciplinary table look like?

**Amy Durall** [00:10:22] So I think you have to first recognize that tables come in all shapes and sizes. There's not just one multidisciplinary table that, that advocates are a part of. In my professional experience as a director of Victim Service Units, I really tried to reinforce making sure that myself and my staff were available and accessible at all the intersection points that victims have with the system. In some circumstances, that meant us sitting around a very large conference table having intentional conversations about topics that were on a pre-prepared agenda, and that can be incredibly helpful to have advocacy as part of those conversations. Those conversations push forward policy discussions. They push forward making sure that we're all adhering to practices that are informed by

research and informed by the experiences of all the talented professionals that are involved in the response. And so those purposeful and intentional conversations around those tables really do matter, and it really matters that advocacy is involved. Advocates at those big tables can also lend their voices to subcommittees or working groups that have specialized focuses. So when you're talking about a subcommittee or a working group that focuses on case review, advocates can be incredibly helpful in that conversation by interpreting the way things are documented or interpreting victim conduct or interpreting outcomes. When it comes to education and training as a subgroup or subcommittee, it's great opportunities for advocates to co-facilitate trainings with other disciplines. It's great opportunities to do cross-agency trainings and learning opportunities. There are certainly subcommittees or working groups that focus on data collection, and advocates in general collect different data points than, say, law enforcement or lab personnel do. And so to get a full picture of sexual assault response, you want people involved from different disciplines to be able to form a comprehensive picture, to know where the gaps are, to know what to respond to. But I think aside from those big conference room tables, there are much smaller tables that advocates can be a part of as well, and they have a seat at those tables. And sometimes, you know, having a space at multidisciplinary tables means there's no table at all, right. Some of my most effective conversations and where myself and my staff have really influenced outcomes or really pushed forward best practices or optimal services for victims have been in hallway discussions, have been in those collaborative spaces where we've spent really solid time building up relationships with our colleagues and they feel comfortable approaching us and saying, "Hey, you know, this thing just happened, and I want your opinion on it." And that's when we can see real work happening. I think when people imagine inviting advocates to multidisciplinary conversations, all of those wonderful outcomes are great to keep in mind, but I think it's also really important to really understand who you're inviting to the table and what that looks like. So the type of advocate you're inviting to the table will affect communication and information exchange parameters. And so you need to understand, if you're inviting a community-based advocate versus a law enforcement-based advocate, what that's going to do to the conversation and how that impacts how you exchange information with each other. But regardless, I think that there's space and opportunity for advocates to be not only invited but welcomed and contributory to those conversations.

**Chris Williams** [00:14:06] Shifting gears just a little bit, one word you've used multiple times that I've latched on to is integrity, and focusing on the conviction integrity, you know, larger picture - the topic, the role that advocates play - I think it's crucial the role that they play in terms of maintaining the integrity of a case. Can you tell us a little bit about how a victim can be involved in the trial process and impact the case and what the victim advocate's role looks like there?

**Amy Durall** [00:14:34] Yeah, I think advocates can do a lot to help protect the integrity of cases as they move through the system. I think from the very onset, I had the pleasure of being a law enforcement-based advocate and running law enforcement-based victim services units, and I saw how much we were able to provide relief, education, experience, insight to the victims who experienced those episodes of sexual violence. We were able to be present during crucial moments to help explain the system to them, to help provide them with necessary information so that they could make educated and informed decisions about how to participate. I think that that really changes the trajectory of how victims receive the process that they're involved in. And so I think making sure that advocacy is available for that is the first step in the right direction. But I think advocates and other allied professionals have to be honest with victims about what their participation means and when they get to participate and when participation is a choice and when it's not. We'd like

to think that when we're practicing in a victim-centered, trauma-informed way, that everything is a choice for the victim. But in reality, there are some decisions in the justice system, there are some processes in the justice system where it's just simply not the victim's choice. And we have just as much responsibility to be honest with them and transparent with them about that as the spaces where they do have choice. For example, adults have different spaces where they can exercise choice than minors do. And vulnerable adults who may have legal guardians have different choice patterns than adults do who don't have legal guardians. And so we need to be very aware and honest and transparent about those circumstances. We need to be honest and transparent when we ask victims questions that are misleading or maybe can be easily misinterpreted, like "do you want to press charges?" And that conveys to victims that, that they actually get to choose whether there's charges that go forward or not, and what we know is that that's typically not the victim's choice. And so asking that question sets up a dynamic in a relationship that takes further effort to overcome. There are spaces and in jurisdictions where during trial process, there are things that are the victim's choice. So that could be they have a choice to be present at hearings or they have a choice to confer with the prosecutor. They have a choice whether to issue a victim impact statement and to have that read verbally or to have that produced in writing. Those are choices that are available to most victims, but there's also spaces around trial decisions where choice looks less like choice, right. So there are spaces where victims are subpoenaed for testimony. And when they're- when they're issued a subpoena, it doesn't feel like choice whether they participate or not. It's an obligation. And so we have a responsibility as professionals to make sure that we're really telling victims the truth about when they have choice and when they don't. And I think that ultimately, when we're as transparent as possible, when we're as honest as possible, when we're as fair as possible about when to offer choices and when to tell them that the choice isn't there, that protects the integrity of not only our interactions, but it protects the integrity of the next professional that's going to come into contact with that victim. It protects the integrity of the overall system response.

**Chris Williams** [00:18:23] I love the points that you made there, Amy, especially about transparency, openness, and honesty. Can you elaborate a little bit more on how criminal justice professionals can truly do their part in respecting a victim's decision whether or not to participate?

**Amy Durall** [00:18:38] One of the things that I would honestly recommend is that every professional who has some responsibility in the justice system response take the time to educate themselves on the other disciplines that are also involved and their roles and responsibilities so that they're really comfortable with knowing where my expertise is best utilized and where the expertise of others is best utilized to meet the needs of the victim. And the other space that I can tell you that I wish everybody, every professional was really comfortable in was in victims' rights. I wish that people were really quickly accessible and knowledgeable about what those rights are and not just handing people a piece of paper that had the rights on them, but really being comfortable within their own disciplines, within their own professional responsibilities, knowing what rights apply at that point in the justice system and instituting policies and practices that help victims meaningfully exercise those rights.

**Chris Williams** [00:19:42] One thing I've heard you reference in development of other resources, webinars, trainings, that sort of thing, is in response to the conclusion of a trial or legal proceedings, the concept of "it's okay to not be okay." This seems like something that some people may not consider thinking about what comes after the trial and the

impact it has on victims or potentially the family if, let's say, it's a homicide. Can you elaborate on that statement "it's okay to not be okay" for our listeners?

**Amy Durall** [00:20:11] So I think I want to answer that on two levels, right. As professionals, I can't help but think that we're all impacted by the work that we do. If we are invested in the work that we do, we're going to have some impact from that. We're exposed to circumstances and, you know, situations that most normal citizens aren't exposed to on a daily basis. And so it's okay for professionals to not be okay, and it's okay for professionals to recognize when they need to step away from their work for a brief period of time to either get some assistance or to have some processing time to re-approach the work in an objective, thoughtful, professional way. But more importantly, to me, the other factor of that is we need to understand as professionals that for people who have experienced victimization, it's okay for them to not be okay. We get the luxury as professionals to step away once we've completed our responsibilities. Once an investigation is done, they move on to the next investigation. Once I've served a particular client or a victim until conclusion, I get to move on to the next step of my job. For many people who experience sexual violence, they don't get an end date. They don't get to move on to the next issue. It becomes part of the fabric of who they are, and we as professionals need to recognize that, and we need to be able to connect them to the best prepared assistance that's available in our community. And that may not be us, right? We need to recognize our peers, our colleagues, the other discipline professionals that we work with, so that when the people who are impacted by victimization have a response, have a reaction, and it may not fall in line with the timing of our responsibilities, we're able to connect them to the people who can assist them, no matter when that is. Sexual assault happens to people and there can be a variety of responses from that. Sexual assault, for some people, marks the real clear turning point in their lives, and we can see it in the way that they start responding, the way that they engage in employment, the way it may affect their housing, it may affect their family relationships, it affects the way they parent their children. But we also need to recognize that for many, many people who have experienced sexual violence or victimization, there are many of those people who lead productive, healthy, and whole lives. And so not every victim is in the same space after experiencing sexual violence, and we as professionals need to be cognizant and respond to people on every step of that spectrum. But we have to- we have to allow people space to have the reactions that they have to whatever they've experienced. And so it's okay that they haven't moved on from an incident that happened ten years ago if there was a ten-year gap in investigative activity. We have to allow people time and space to respond and incorporate information and healing the way that they need to.

**Chris Williams** [00:23:17] I love the way that you've articulated that and expressed truly the importance of putting the victim and their needs at the forefront of everything that is being done. Taking things to the big picture a little bit, in your professional opinion, what should agencies or organizations be doing routinely to optimize their ability to assist victims and/or their families?

**Amy Durall** [00:23:38] I think the advice that I- that I give to people consistently, pretty routinely is keep it simple. Remember that these are terrible things that have happened to people. But probably the most important thing that you can do is just be human, show up with some compassion, effectively partner with the other professionals who, who share in this work. Make sure that you're humble enough to learn something from the other people that you work with. Make sure that you're humble enough to learn how to adjust your responses from the people who you're serving and just keep it simple. These are human beings that have been impacted by terrible circumstances, and we have a professional

responsibility to show up and to show up in the best way possible. If you're going to take on the responsibility of doing this work, you also take on the responsibility of responding effectively.

**Chris Williams** [00:24:27] I love that, I truly do. Wrapping up the discussion today, I wanted to know what's next for you - is there anything coming out that you're particularly excited about, anything coming up, any travel, projects, resources, anything like that?

**Amy Durall** [00:24:41] Well, I think we always get involved in a variety of work that's always exciting, right? We get involved in a variety of, of different topics and resources and deliverables and events that really give us the opportunity to reach new people, to stretch our wings, and kind of learn about ourselves and be able to provide new conversations and fill in gaps where maybe information is missing. Just through the SAKI project, there are some resources that have been approved for us to work on that I'm really excited about them coming out. One of them is going to be a resource on communication plans with people that are impacted by cold case violent crimes, and the importance of really tailoring your communication responses to the people that you're serving. There's been approval to develop an ethical advocacy series. I'm really excited about that opportunity because that gives me an opportunity to kind of relay information to people that I consider my closest allies, right - people who share my discipline - around how we can do our job effectively and how we can raise our game about how to perform advocacy in a way that's going to be ethical within the greater justice system. You know, there's opportunities to have conversations and these types of conversations with new discipline members. I have, I have a training opportunity coming up to be able to have conversations around sexual violence with victim compensation administrators. And that's an avenue of professionals that we don't routinely talk to enough. And they hold a very key role in sexual violence response, you know, getting people access to services and compensation in spaces where they need it. So there's no shortage of things that I'm involved in that I'm excited about. And I'm- I'm just really grateful for the opportunity that we keep finding spaces where there's gaps to fill needs.

**Chris Williams** [00:26:35] Absolutely. Sounds like some fantastic opportunities. I know I'm excited to work with you further on at least one of those. I always appreciate hearing your perspective and, you know, based on your expertise and whatnot, but any final thoughts you'd like to share with our listeners before we wrap up the episode today?

**Amy Durall** [00:26:52] Thanks, Chris. I really just appreciate the opportunity to kind of reflect on how we can go about doing this work in the best way possible and just like to reinforce to people that it matters, right? How we show up professionally matters to the people that we serve. Hopefully that's something that people feel compelled to do for, you know, for the remainder of their professional careers. And we keep showing up for the people that we serve in the best way possible.

**Chris Williams** [00:27:18] Thank you, Amy. Really appreciate you sitting down and talking with Just Science to discuss this important aspect of incorporating advocacy into the criminal justice process. We really appreciate your time today.

**Amy Durall** [00:27:30] Thanks so much, Chris.

**Chris Williams** [00:27:31] If you enjoyed today's conversation, be sure to like and follow Just Science on your podcast platform of choice. For more information on today's topic and resources on enhancing conviction integrity through forensics, visit [SAKITTA.org](http://SAKITTA.org).

That's S-A-K-I-T-T-A dot org. I'm Chris Williams, and this has been another episode of Just Science.

**Voiceover** [00:27:54] Next week, Just Science sits down with retired Sergeant Jim Markey of RTI International to discuss the critical role that law enforcement plays in maintaining the integrity of a conviction. This project was supported by Grant No. 2019-MU-BX-K011 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.